

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

1-23 (cancelled)

24. (new) Process for the treatment of tobacco leaves (Nicotiana tabacum) comprising the following steps: a) drying and curing of the leaves; b) extraction of dried leaves with a solvent or mixture of solvents ; c) re-drying of the extracted leaves; d) elimination of the ribs.

25. (new) Process as claimed in claim 24, wherein the solvent is selected from methanol, ethanol, propanol, isopropanol, acetone, ethylene glycol, water or mixtures thereof; possibly adjusting pH with buffers.

26. (new) Process as claimed in claim 25, wherein the solvent is ethanol.

27. (new) Process as claimed in claim 26, wherein the solvent mixture is an ethanol/water mixture with a strength of between 20° and 80°.

28. (new) Process as claimed in claim 27, wherein the mixture has a strength of 50°.

29. (new) Process as claimed in claim 24, wherein the weight ratio between tobacco and solvent mixture is between 1: 5 and 1: 30.

30. (new) Process as claimed in claim 29, wherein the weight ratio between tobacco and solvent mixture is 1 : 16.

31. (new) Process as claimed in claim 24, wherein the extraction carried out for a time of between 3 and 16 hours.
32. (new) Process as claimed in claim 31, wherein the extraction carried out for 8 hours.
33. (new) Process as claimed in claim 24, wherein the extraction temperature is between 20 and 80°C.
34. (new) Process as claimed in claim 33, wherein the extraction temperature is 60°C.
35. (new) Process as claimed in claim 24, wherein the extraction is performed 1-5 times.
36. (new) Process as claimed in claim 35, wherein the extraction carried out once.
37. (new) Process as claimed in claim 24, wherein the leaves are re-dried under vacuum.
38. (new) Process as claimed in claim 24, wherein the leaves are re-dried for 36-48 hours.
39. (new) Process as claimed in claim 24, wherein the leaves are re-dried at the temperature of 35°C.
40. (new) Process as claimed in claim 24, wherein Virginia Bright tobacco leaves are used.
41. (new) Tobacco leaves with a low nicotine content obtainable by the process claimed in claim 24.
42. (new) Tobacco leaves with a low chloride content obtainable by the process claimed in claim 24.
43. (new) Tobacco leaves with a low nicotine and chloride content obtainable by the process claimed in claim 24.

44. (new) Tobacco leaves with improved combustibility obtainable by the process claimed in claim 24.

45. (new) Method of preparing smoking products such as cigarettes, cigars and shags, with a low nicotine content and/or improved combustibility, which comprises using the tobacco leaves of claim 41.

46. (new) Products containing tobacco leaves as claimed in claim 41, also mixed with suitable excipients and flavourings.